CHAPTER 3

LOSING BIGFOOT

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ABSTRACT

The chapter sketches out a putative ethnography of Bigfooting, detailing what we can study from analysing television programmes of the practice, but also what we lose by not being there, by not embedding ourselves in the Bigfooting community, and by not participating in their woodland expeditions.

Keywords: Bigfoot; bigfooting; cryptozoology; fringe; learning to see; science and technology studies

INTRODUCTION

Most of us will have heard of Bigfoot or Sasquatch.[1] We likely know some facts about it: an ape-like (humanoid, even) bipedal creature, tall, muscular, perhaps over seven foot, covered with thick, coarse, dark, hair. We might know the habitat and distribution of the creature – the thick, mountainous forests of the American Pacific Northwest and Canada. Some will even be able to provide an outline of the 'character' of Bigfoots: skittish, stealthy, easily spooked. We *know* all this, and these constitute a constellation of fairly stable, shared facts. But most of us will also *know* that the overwhelming consensus within the scientific community is that such a creature does not exist. For most, Bigfoot exists only as a cultural phenomenon, a myth, a fiction and not as an object for science to take seriously. We are sociologists of science; if Bigfoot is not an object for science is there anything here for us to study?

Naturally enough, some science outside of institutional science *is* studied by Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars, including citizen science projects, indigenous and lay knowledges, fringe science and scientific policy issues such as

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anti-vaccinations protests. But it is difficult to argue that Bigfoot is anything other than a marginal topic for STS.

Less well known is the practice of 'Bigfooting'. This involves members of the public spending several days in dense woodlands, away from human activity that Bigfoot is presumed to avoid, equipped with camping gear and a range of instruments intended to collect evidence of its existence. These include cameras and video recorders, night vision goggles and scopes, audio recorders, plaster to cast foot-prints, bags to collect hair and spoor, as well as whistles, 'tree knockers', and soundblasters, which are used to elicit Bigfoot 'calls'. Using these technologies, Bigfooters employ a repertoire of well-established community techniques to search for traces of the creature. These practices, as well as the formative intentions of 'Bigfooters' (also known as 'Squatchers'), are much the same as those of other 'cryptozoologists' (see Eberhart, 2002 for a compendium of cryptozoological creatures), and draws on Squatchers' understanding of existing zoological and primatological research. For example, since Bigfoot is understood to be nocturnal and, as is the case with great apes, able to communicate over long distances by calling and pounding on tree trunks, Bigfooters trek up and down animal trails between dusk and dawn calling into the darkness utilising a mixture of whoops, howls and woodknocks. During daylight hours, Bigfooters search for footprints, scat, hair and other evidence such as traces of nesting and characteristically bent trees. These techniques are learnt on expeditions and then shared within the Bigfooting community, as is any evidence collected – recordings of 'vocalisations', reports of sightings, biological material – at 'town hall' meetings, well-attended Bigfoot conferences, or through databases such as the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization (BRFO) (2017) and the Olympic Project.[2]

This ethnography of Bigfooting is currently lost to us. It is highly unlikely that a UK research council would be interested in funding what might be viewed as a fringe North American hobby. Furthermore, as UK sociologists, how would we legitimately gain access to these communities? However, although we are currently unable to tramp up and down the forested mountains of the Pacific Northwest, we do have some form of (highly mediated) access to this world. In fact, this access is quite detailed, and while in no way a substitute for 'proper', observational research, this allows us to put a little flesh on this cryptozoological skeleton. Because Bigfooters leave their own traces; while Bigfooters have access to the Patterson-Gimlin film (of which, more later) and other recordings of Sasquatch, we have television programmes about Bigfooting like *Finding Bigfoot* (TV series 2011–) and *Chasing Bigfoot: the quest for truth* (TV series 2015–), documentary films such as *Sasquatch Odyssey: The Hunt for Bigfoot* (1999), as well as the websites of the Bigfooting communities.

But what insights have we lost by not physically being there? Drawing on work in STS, this chapter sketches out a putative ethnography of Bigfooting. Questions we would explore include: how do you learn to 'experience' Bigfoot, to 'see' traces of Bigfoot, to accomplish the evidential practices of Bigfooting when scientific consensus maintains that none of these experiences and none of the material collected is evidence at all? More specifically, and this is why ethnography is the only suitable method to study Bigfooting properly, how do you learn to see, hear

and smell Bigfoot in the darkness of the deep forest? How, in this 'wild' place, do you develop the ability to distinguish Bigfoot calls from the howls of coyotes, the hoots of owls and other unfamiliar forest noises that circulate at night? How do you learn to hear Bigfoot knocking on wood? Or learn to distinguish a rock being thrown by Bigfoot into a nearby water source from a beaver's tail slapping as it enters the river? And, for an ethnographer, what are the boundaries of the epistemology of a participatory ethnography of Bigfooting if you are a Bigfoot sceptic? Can you learn these discriminatory skills, to see traces of Bigfoot in ways that meet the standards of the Bigfoot community? Essentially, in what ways does an ethnographer's dis/belief in Bigfoot change the conduct and writing of an ethnography of the knowledge practices of Bigfooting?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIGFOOT

Barring a few exceptions, scientists routinely dismiss the existence of Bigfoot. However, animals that are 'yet to be discovered' *are* a category of thing that science accepts exists, with the identification of new species occurring relatively frequently. Estimates for the number of undiscovered species range from 3–100 million (Wilson, 2003). Although the discovery of a new mammal is a rarer and more newsworthy event, since the turn of the twenty-first century, science has still identified several previously unknown mammals (Stromberg, 2013).

Some 'discoveries' of previously unknown mammals are perhaps better understood as taxonomic refinement. For example, in 2001, genetic evidence demonstrated that the smaller African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) was a distinct species from its larger cousin (*Loxodonta africana*). This sort of discovery differs in a number of ways from searching for Bigfoot, some quite obvious. For our purposes, we highlight differences in the 'site' of discovery. In the case of the African forest elephant, the key work of 'discovery' took place in the laboratory. By contrast, the key research site involved in the discovery of species such as the Sundaland clouded leopard is 'the field' (sometimes literally, but also jungles, mountains, the deep sea). This kind of zoology, including most cryptozoology, might involve the laboratory, but the scientific and evidential practices that are key to discovery are those involved in bringing back rigorous, well-documented evidence of the *existence* of the animal.

Cryptozoology is the (often 'lay' and fringe) branch of zoology concerned with the study of animal species whose existence is averred by local traditions and other forms of evidence, but is not supported by evidence acceptable as sufficient by mainstream scientific communities (Dubois & Nemesio, 2007; Prothero, 2007). Cryptozoology has been defined as the 'scientific study of *hidden* animals, that is, of still unknown animal forms about which only testimonial and circumstantial evidence is available, or material evidence considered insufficient by some!' (Heuvelmans, 1988, cited in Coleman & Clark, 1999, p. 76). The first recorded use of the term is attributed to Bernard Heuvelmans, a French-Belgian zoologist. Heuvelmans insisted that the field should be concerned with 'real flesh and blood' animals such as the Komodo dragon (*Varanas Komodoensis*), which only

became known to Western science in the early part of the twentieth century. Thus, he endeavoured to position cryptozoology as a scientific activity, not concerned with investigations into supernatural or imaginary 'creatures' like ghosts or the Phoenix.[3]

However, formal attempts to define the field and stabilise its methodologies did not appear until several years after Heuvelmans began using the term, when the peer-reviewed journal *Cryptozoology* appeared in 1982 (it folded in 1998[4]) with narrow circulation and limited impact on the scientific community. In fact, these last few decades of the twentieth century were pivotal for cryptozoological research. In 1983, at a time when some argued that mainstream science was failing to investigate phenomena that mattered to lay people (Epstein, 1996; Wynne, 1992), the word 'cryptid' emerged to replace terms such as 'monster' or 'beast'. Terminology that conjured up images of the mythical and the grotesque[5] was replaced by an appellation that gave the matter a scientific bearing. 'Cryptid' has since been adopted across cryptozoological communities as the acceptable term for the category of unknown-to-science animals that are the object of their research (Hurn, 2017).

Significantly, Bigfoot has also been used to symbolise the cost of the expansion of 'civilisation' and the resultant loss of wilderness.[6] Recently, Ceballos, Ehrlich, and Dirzo (2017) proclaimed that we are currently overseeing a mass extinction of known mammals. But this loss of wilderness is not simply the result of various forms of annihilation; human practices of domestication have also meant the 'wild' has increasingly been 'tamed'.[7] For example, the domestication of animals (livestock, pets, animals in sanctuaries or zoos) has increased almost three-fold from 1.6 billion large mammals in 1900 to over 4.3 billion at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Smil, 2013). And yet, in this new era of the Anthropocene, in which humans have (irreversibly) transformed the Earth, including worldwide destruction of natural habitats and anthropogenic climate change, popular books, and television programmes on cryptozoology and cryptids have never been so fashionable (Dendle, 2006). Just as Bigfoot has become one manifestation of the lament of a lost American wilderness, perhaps enthusiasm for cryptids and cryptozoology feeds on a desire for there to still be an unknown, an unexplored, an 'uncivilised', a place off the edge of the map marked 'Here Be Monsters'.

Of course, Bigfoot is not simply a contemporary phenomenon. Stories of Bigfoot have a history that predate European colonisation, rooted in North American indigenous culture (Bader, Mencken, & Baker, 2010). Known by various tribes as Wendigo, Oh-Mah, Chenoo, as well as other names (Coleman, 2003), the term *Sasquatch* is the anglicised Salish word for *Sokqueatl* (Ilacqua, 2014). Indeed, the first written English-language Bigfoot story was said to be published in the diaries of missionary Elkanah Walker in the mid-nineteenth century. However, excepting some high-profile reports such as that in Theodore Rooseveldt's memoirs, the mysterious ape-human cryptid was an infrequent subject of interest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, it was not until 1958, when newspapers in California reported a construction crew discussing gigantic human-like footprints close to their machinery that the idea reached popular culture (Bader et al., 2010). The imprints were said to be left by something with a 'big foot', and the name stuck.[8]

Nine years later the most cited piece of evidence of Bigfoot was captured on video; the now iconic Patterson–Gimlin film. In 1967, at Bluff Creek (once more in California), Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin filmed an unidentified, hulking, ape-like figure with a flat face and pronounced snout lolloping along a creek bed, arms swaying low from side-to-side, looking briefly over its shoulder at the camera. The one-minute film, shot in colour on a shaky hand-held camera has since been scrutinised nearly as much as Bigfoot itself, being the subject of many attempts to authenticate or debunk. The film-makers remained unshakeable in their position that the film was neither tampered with nor staged. Until his death in 1972, Patterson maintained that the creature captured on film was genuine, and Gimlin, while mostly avoiding publicly discussing the subject until the 2000s – when he began giving TV interviews and appearing at Bigfoot conferences – has always denied that the film was a hoax. Though the recording certainly did not close the question 'is Bigfoot real?', it cemented Bigfoot into the public imagination; providing an iconic visual reference point. Today, the film forms part of the stimulus that propels Bigfoot enthusiasts out into the woods, giving them reason and evidential support to capture their own evidence.

While the Patterson-Gimlin film might be a rare (and highly disputed) example of capturing Bigfoot on camera, Sasquatch has proved less elusive in popular culture. Bigfoot has left an indelible 'footprint' on contemporary (particularly North American) society. For example, a Bigfoot – *Quatchi* – was the official mascot of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, while *Squatch* was the mascot for the Seattle Supersonics basketball team for over a decade. On television and film, Sasquatch has made appearances in cartoons including the recent film Smallfoot (2018), as well as adventure, action and fantasy programmes. But Bigfoot is not simply limited to cameo appearances, having starred in the long running television series *Harry and the Hendersons,* been the focus of Phil Darg's 2012 *Sasquatched! The Musical*, and has an annual musical festival held in Washington named after it. Bigfoot is also a tourist attraction with bespoke museums and exhibitions in California. Some remote towns even organise Bigfoot conventions, selling Bigfoot memorabilia to visitors; activities which become important parts of the local economy.

Where there is money, there is law, and Bigfoot has not escaped the attention of legal documents. Bigfoot can be found in two Sasquatch preservation laws: the *1969 Skamania County ordinance no. 1969-01*, later partially repealed and amended in the 1984 version, and the *1991 Whatcom County Resolution no. 92-043*.[9] Both profess to protect a creature that if it did exist would undeniably be endangered, with Skamania County declaring its boundaries a *'Sasquatch Refuge'* (see Ilacqua, 2014). Other official documents that concern Bigfoot include the Environmental Atlas for Washington published by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1979, which provided a map identifying all known reports of the cryptid, and most recently *Senate Bill 5816*, which would make Sasquatch the official cryptid of Washington.

This brief history of Bigfoot in nature and culture is important because as Coleman and Clark (1999, p. 40) state, the pinning of the term 'Bigfoot was a significant cultural event' that organised 'unidentifiable sights, sounds and traces under a single rubric' (Turner, 2017, p. 17). Today, the peculiar noise in the forest,

the unexplained sighting on top of a mountain and the unaccounted encounter in the woods can now all be attributed to a phenomenon. It can all be attributed to Sasquatch.

SAT WATCHING SASQUATCHING

Although it is now half a century old, the Patterson-Gimlin film has, in recent years, seen a resurgence in its cultural resonance. Contemporary Bigfoot documentaries and television shows are screened on such nominally sober and serious channels as Discovery and Animal Planet, and the Patterson-Gimlin film is often cited as the central reference point. In many cases, these documentaries are about the Bigfooting community to a far greater degree than they are about Bigfoot itself, showing people from a range of backgrounds – most without any formal scientific training – investigating the phenomenon. Notwithstanding the fact that these entertainment documentaries are subject to the type of framing and editorial license typical of shows that endeavour to build mystery and suspense, we maintain that they *can* provide us with *some* insight into the social worlds of Bigfooters. We argue, that for at least a large proportion of the Bigfooting community, as shown in these television shows, their *formative intention* is to collect rigorous, scientifically acceptable evidence of the existence of Bigfoot.[10] To this end, we see these Bigfooting documentaries as being unlike other superficially similar (phantom) monster hunt programmes such as *Most Haunted*.

Programmes like *Most Haunted* are artifice in a way that Bigfooting documentaries are not. Unlike the participants in *Finding Bigfoot* who are active, committed 'Bigfooters', Yvette Fielding does not routinely 'hunt ghosts', except as part of entertainment television. *Most Haunted* therefore is not representative of an evidential culture.[11] By contrast, we can be fairly confident that Bigfooters on *Finding Bigfoot* are performing the kinds of activities that are worth considering by STS scholars. Bigfooters – and especially the Bigfoot community – are not 'invented' to entertain the public; they exist outside the framing of the small screen as a community of enthusiasts with longstanding traditions of evidence and claim making. We only need to read the Olympic Project (2017) website to recognise that Bigfooting is a knowledge-making activity conducted in earnest.

> The Olympic Project is an association of dedicated researchers, investigators, biologists and trackers committed to documenting the existence of Sasquatch through science and education. Through comprehensive habitat study, DNA analysis and game camera deployment, our goal is to obtain as much information and empirical evidence as we can, with hopes of being as prepared as possible when and if species verification comes to fruition…. [Olympic Project]

The recent popularisation of Bigfooting on television has meant that some of the evidential and claim-making practices of the community are now conducted in front of a large public audience,[12] which in turn provides us with a body of material that can be studied and analysed at a distance: we can sit and watch Sasquatching from the comforts of our couches. A typical narrative of a *Finding Bigfoot* episode runs as follows.

After reports of sightings of Bigfoot are posted on the BRFO website, the show's presenters and four investigators – Matt Moneymaker ('founder of the BRFO'), James 'Bobo' Fay ('expert field caller'), Cliff Barackman ('evidence analyst') and resident sceptic (and 'trained biologist'), Ranae Holland – visit the town in question. They invite the local public to a town hall meeting and ask people to come forward if they have had an experience that they are unable to account for. When recounting tales of their encounters, the public at these meetings draw on a vast repertoire of everyday descriptors to describe phenomena that, by definition, falls outside their day-to-day worlds. They often draw on common cultural resources and mundane framings, for example, 'it towered over the barn', 'it walked on two legs so it wasn't a bear', 'it let out a guttural roar that reverberated down my body', 'I heard three distinctive knocks on a tree stump that echoed down the valley'. The investigators then 'translate' these stories into the Bigfooting community's technical language – and into accounts that can be used as *evidence* – terms such as 'vocalisations', the 'Ohio howl' or 'woodknocking'.

The investigators then choose several of what they consider to be the more plausible accounts to investigate further and travel with the witness to the site where the incident occurred. The witness is then prompted to identify the distinctive features of what they saw; to speak of the shape, size, colour, behaviour and gait of the beast they encountered. They are also asked to recall the time of day of their sighting, the weather conditions and to account for why they were at the (remote) location. Most testimonials fit within a typical Bigfoot narrative; a tall, imposing creature lurking in the woods as they were out fishing, camping or hunting, or a large, dark creature gracefully running across a road that divides an animal trail in two or three giant strides.

Despite the commonality in these narratives, it is important to stress that 'Bigfoot' is not an entirely stable entity. Some speak of seeing grey or white creatures, others of animals much shorter than the archetype, perhaps only four feet tall. The investigators practice (or at least perform) processes of discrimination, and some of these stories are dismissed out-of-hand as not credible Bigfoot sightings. However, for the most part (on screen at least), even those sightings that do not fit typical Bigfoot descriptions are accepted as worthy of consideration. Observations that deviate from this description can be explained; the grey beast is an old Bigfoot; the four-foot-tall animal is a juvenile Bigfoot. That is, there is a process of negotiation between the investigators – who re-create the scene to verify the legitimacy of the claim or to determine whether it could simply be a case of mistaken identity[13] – and the witnesses. While much of this is likely artifice for the camera and the viewers, it is a performance of evidential practice that occurs within the Bigfooting community. In this process, personal credibility is a key component of the 'evidential weight' or 'evidential significance' (see Pinch, 1985) of an account, with those we might describe as being 'respected pillars of the community' (e.g. local sheriffs, tribal elders) trusted more, as are others who might have something to lose by telling their Bigfoot story. What is clear though is that the investigators assume a privileged gaze, their expertise in Bigfooting providing them with the relevant social and rhetorical resources to act as the adjudicators of whether these witnesses have encountered a Sasquatch.

For Bader et al. (2010), Bigfooters think of themselves as 'normal people' who simply believe in, or have had an encounter, with Bigfoot. 'Bigfoot ain't no unicorn you know', as one of their respondents said, attempting to stress their community's distinction from the other subjects of their exploration of 'Paranormal America'. Indeed, as a community of practice, Bigfooters do boundary work (Gieryn, 1983), policing their borders, aware of how fragile any credibility is that they might have as an evidential culture concerned with natural phenomena. For example, those who speculate that Bigfoot might be an alien hopping between dimensions – explaining why we only catch fleeting glimpses of them – are fiercely dismissed by the 'naturalistic' Bigfooting research community.

After discussing Bigfoot sightings with witnesses and re-staging the encounter, the *Finding Bigfoot* team then agree on an area where they might encounter a Bigfoot. The team set up camp and conduct a night investigation. Here, a section of the woods is constituted as the site of inspection. The mode of 'seeing' Bigfoot is accomplished using a suite of technologies, including night vision goggles, Go-Pro cameras, thermal imagers, parabolic microphones and drones, allowing Bigfooters to extend their view, rendering visible what otherwise might not be seen (or heard) in the dark. Bigfoot, though, does not reveal itself unproblematically. Bigfoot is essentially seen in *absentia* (see Atkinson, 1995), built up from a constellation of traces, signs and representations that turn it into a whole creature. These processes of 'seeing' and constructing evidence of Bigfoot bring the role of interpretive flexibility (Pinch & Bijker, 1984) to the surface.

LOST AND FOUND

The field of cryptozoology including the practice of Bigfooting challenges the mainstream taxonomy of animals. If we are to take this challenge seriously, for us at least, there are four categories of ontological status of animals. These we call (i) found, (ii) lost, (iii) hidden and (iv) imagined. The groups are reproduced in Table 1.

It is important to stress that the typology is fluid and that animals can move from one grouping to the next over time. 'Hidden' animals such as the *Olinguito*

Table 1. Typology of Animal Known-ness.

'Known-ness'	Description of Category
Found	These are animals accepted to exist by institutional science. They are animals revealed through field/laboratory work and are now 'known' by the scientific community. Evidence is readily available and rarely challenged.
Lost	These are animals that are no longer accepted to exist by institutional science. They are animals that were previously in the *Found* category but are now known or suspected to be extinct.
Hidden	These are animals that are *unknown* to science but are *known* to people employing 'non-scientific' ways of knowing. They are animals that have yet to reveal themselves (or yet to be revealed) and, as such, are not accepted by mainstream science to exist. They are animals that might be considered *cryptids*.
Imagined	These are 'creatures' that institutional science *knows* do not, never did, and perhaps cannot exist. These animals are not objects for science.

have been 'Found', 'Found' animals such as the *Tasmanian Tiger* are sometimes 'Lost', and previously 'Lost' animals such as the *Black-footed Ferret* can be rediscovered and are now '(Re-)Found'.

Bigfooters would maintain that Bigfoot is simply a 'Hidden' animal; that it is a cryptid unknown to science (but known within local lore and non-scientific practices) and that its existence simply needs revealing. Complete success for the Bigfooting community would be for enough evidence to have been collected – physical, visual, audio and the accounts of credible witnesses – to convince institutional science that the status of Bigfoot should be reappraised and it recognised as a 'Found' animal. This would likely require someone to capture a Bigfoot.

On the other hand, many Bigfoot sceptics would position Bigfoot as 'Imagined' – a mythical creature, a fiction that is not a fitting object for scientific gaze. The importance of boundary-work is not lost on Bigfooters. The thicker line in Table 1 between 'Hidden' and 'Imagined' represents the increased difficulty in moving the status of the animal from the 'Imagined' category to one of the other groupings. Bigfooters perform boundary-work, at least part, in order to position their activity as deserving of credibility, as being an activity with rigorous evidential practices dealing with a phenomenon that should be a proper object for scientific study. Thus, accounts of witnesses observing a white or red orb floating before 'seeing' Sasquatch (as shown on *Finding Bigfoot*), or explanations of Bigfoot being from another dimension, are routinely dismissed out-of-hand. Accepting accounts and theories such as these as having a part of Bigfooting's collective knowledge would add weight to arguments that Bigfoot should be positioned as 'Imagined', alongside mythical creatures such as Mermaids. As the pursuit of a 'Hidden' animal however, Bigfooting is an activity that has the potential to fit neatly into contemporary scientific rationalities. We argue Bigfooters therefore require an 'Imagined' category to exist to provide credibility to the 'Hidden' category.

HOW BIGFOOTERS PRODUCE EVIDENCE

Witness accounts can be brought back from the field, but they are not tangible, 'objective' evidence. What Bigfooters hope to find is evidence that can be demonstrated, analysed and shared, in order to build the case for Bigfoot that would be accepted by those outside the community of Bigfooters. This could transform Bigfoot into a 'Found' animal.

Footprints are particularly important evidence for Bigfooters. Sasquatch footprints are said to be large, sometimes upward of sixteen inches, wide and containing 'dermal ridges'; valleys in the foot not said to be found in humans.[14] Muddy areas as well as other inaccessible places close to riverbanks are searched for tracks. If impressions are found that fit the description, they are measured and photographed. Experienced Bigfooters will often place an everyday object next to the track for scale. More sophisticated investigators will take a cast of the print using plaster. The physicality of footprints – when compared to witness accounts or audio recordings for example, – matters. In *Chasing Bigfoot* (2015–), John Pickering, a core member of the Olympic Project, says, 'When you have actual

tracks on the ground, you have evidence … something tangible to look at and study'. Cliff Barackman states that while, 'Evidence comes in many forms, footprint casts are some of the most compelling….' Some of this evidence has even reached institutional science; Professor Jeffrey Meldrum at Idaho University has collected over 200 of these jumbo-sized casts, which he maintains are Sasquatch prints.

But Bigfooters always face the scepticism of the public and the scientific community (notwithstanding the occasional academic Bigfoot believer such as Meldrum). If they are to succeed, not only in finding Bigfoot to their own satisfaction, but in moving Bigfoot for those outside of their community from the category of 'Imagined' to 'Hidden' (or even 'Found'), they must *legitimate* their evidential practices. Bigfooters must aspire to rigorous practices in the face of disbelief and dismissal. Derek Randles, co-founder of the Olympic Project, says, 'Documentation's everything … if we … find a good set of tracks … that we deem … very possible, then we will take that set of tracks and we will document everything we possibly can….'

Squatchers maintain that Bigfoot walks in a way that is quite distinct from humans. Their particular gait leaves distinctive impressions in the ground that can be 'seen' if the observer knows what to look for (i.e. has been socialised into the Bigfooting evidentiary culture) before the process of making a plaster cast. The following exchange is from the episode *Bright Lights and Bigfoot* (2017) in *Finding Bigfoot* in which Holland and Barackman come across some small prints in the mud.

Holland: It is small

Barackman: Yes, but there are small Sasquatches. I am going to photograph these. Always have to use a scale item. I don't have a tape measure but I have a battery box.

Holland: First thing I'm noticing Cliff is that there is quite an arch there.

Barackman: Yes, the arch is right here, you can see the longitudinal arch. But more important, you can see that the deepest part right here … is on the head of the metatarsals … right before the phalanges. Humans push off on the head of the metatarsals. Sasquatches push off on the base of the metatarsals. They are small human prints. Mystery solved.

[Camera pans away and Barackman does piece to camera]

Human beings have arches. Sasquatches don't. They have relatively flat feet … Their footprints look different because of that.

Although the tracks were found at a site where humans would be unlikely to be walking around barefoot, on this occasion it was determined that the prints were left by a young human.

In addition to footprints, Bigfooters search for all manner of Sasquatch residue: spoor, traces of hair, etc. However, not all evidence involves bringing solid, material traces back from the field. Audio recordings of supposed Bigfoot calls are also an important form of evidence that can be brought back from the field in a way that satisfies criteria of objectivity. Unlike footprints casts, the recordings themselves

can be shared online as support for the argument for Bigfoot and, by opening up the evidence to analysis by sceptics, as support for the 'scientificness' of Bigfooting. In this area, Bigfooting has been helped by the 'democratisation' of audio analysis technology over the past decade. As Barackman says in *Chasing Bigfoot*, 'When it comes to audio recordings, there's different ways to analyse that now. Like spectrographs … looking at the waveforms'.

Bigfoot evidence, though, lacks established, accepted reference points; a recorded howl or a footprint cannot match what we 'know' of Bigfoot, at least not to the standards required by scientists outside the Bigfoot community. Evidence, therefore, is compared to what it is not. As Robert Swain, also in *Chasing Bigfoot*, puts it, 'We have a lot of audio that you just can't identify, it's not coyotes, it's not fox, it's not barred owls, it's not deer blowing … Animals in the woods make some really weird noises, and if you're not careful you'll say, "oh, this is Bigfoot"'. As with many other forms of evidence, Bigfooters seek validation and legitimacy by deferring to the expertise of accredited scientists. John Andrews described such an occasion; 'An organisation took it to a university, and they came back and said, if it's human, it's what they called at the 'outlier', the extreme of human sounds. But we know that at the distance of a mile away it would have been humanly impossible for someone to sustain that volume for ten calls'. Once again, for Bigfooters the process is one of eliminating the likely.[15]

Similar legitimation practices occur with other forms of evidence, including hair, which Bigfooters bag up and arrange to have tested, both microscopic inspections of the structure, and genetic testing. In *Bigfoot Files* (2015), screened on Channel 4 and hosted by Dr Mark Evans, most of the hair tested turned out to be from familiar animals, including livestock. However, one of the samples tested by Professor Bryan Sykes (Oxford University), was said to be a complete match with a jawbone of an ancient polar bear found in Norway, although this has since been disputed (Than, 2013).

Bigfooting is therefore an evidentiary culture; its central, constitutive activities involve collecting evidence, documenting research practices and building a material case for the existence of Bigfoot. Thus, as much as there are staunch (almost religious) Bigfoot believers, the community attempts to address the claims of its existence through adopting a form of scientific reasoning. But the search for evidence of phenomena that has no standard reference means that there are no measures except for what can be shown 'not to be Bigfoot' – such as the promising thermal image that turns out to be a cow in a field – 'or not identified as a known animal' and therefore plausibly Bigfoot. Moreover, if specialist Bigfooters such as the four investigators in *Finding Bigfoot* are the arbiters as to whether stories by members of the public are credible, it is scientists (at scientific institutions such as universities) who scrutinise the physical, biological or audio evidence collected and judge whether there is something explained in terms of 'the known', or if there is something that remains unexplained and therefore of interest.

Not all the physical evidence of Bigfoot is amenable to elimination by institutional science though; in particular, the bent tree branches and 'nests' that are said to be left behind by the cryptid. Whether a particular arrangement of branches is characteristic of Bigfoot is a judgement that can only be made by Bigfooters.

Spotting these traces requires a properly socialised eye. As the BRFO (2017) website states: Bigfoot's 'impact on the land is so subtle that it takes a trained eye to even notice it'. It is here that ethnographic methods would be invaluable, irreplaceable even.

BECOMING SENSITISED TO BIGFOOT

As we have shown, Bigfooting is unlike a confident, mainstream scientific discipline that sets evidential standards internally. Bigfooters are always on the defensive, orienting their evidentiary claims against criticism (both direct and internalised) from the outside. So much of this evidentiary culture of Bigfooting demands a socialisation of the senses. As a 'lost ethnography', we are interested in what we cannot learn from reading about and watching these communities from a distance. We would not expect to understand how science works from simply sitting at home watching *Horizon*, so why should we expect to understand Bigfooting from afar?

Hearing Bigfoot

Since Bigfoot is nocturnal, the best time to go Bigfooting is at dark, adding complications to our ethnographic ambitions of 'learning to see'. In the case of *Finding Bigfoot* (TV series 2011–), the investigators divide into two teams and position themselves either side of the valley. They then attempt to hoodwink the creature by feigning to be another Bigfoot through a series of guttural roars and howls. Success lies in hearing – or better still, recording – a response. But expert fieldworkers then still need to determine what made the response. If the usual suspects are eliminated, if it is not recognised as a coyote howl or an owl hoot, it could plausibly be Bigfoot.

And yet, success is not simply determined by stimulating a response that cannot be identified. Responsive cries from coyotes are also a sign of Bigfoot's presence since evidence of one predator in the surroundings is said to increase the chances of another being present. Bigfoot then is not simply seen in *absentia*, it is also seen by association. As Moneymaker says 'if you are not hearing coyotes, you are probably not hearing Bigfoot either'.

A similar technique of imitating the sounds of Bigfoot involves finding a healthy looking tree and then proceeding to thump the trunk with a club or large stick. Again, a successful hunt is one in which they hear a woodknock in response. Being sensitised to Sasquatch then involves knowing what one sounds like, learning to simulate that sound to stimulate a response, and being able to distinguish a Bigfoot response from other forest noises or from another set of Bigfooters woodknocking in another canyon. In both techniques – mimicking Bigfoot vocalisations and woodknocking – Bigfooters are dependent on weather conditions being good for their calls, and any response, to carry.

Seeing Bigfoot

'Seeing' Bigfoot is aided by a suite of detecting technologies that render Bigfoot visible in the forest at night. One such technology is the thermal imager that picks up any discernible heat source. Against a cold background, a warm-blooded animal will present as white on a predominately black screen. When out on an investigation, Bigfooters *actively* look for signs and traces of its existence. Locations are said to *feel* 'squatchy', meaning they are ideal habitats for Bigfoot to live. This might be close to a rather inhospitable water source like a swamp or a creek, near cornfields where deer – a known Bigfoot delicacy – roam, or under the shadow of rolling hills that cover Bigfoots from icy winds. Feeling 'squatchy' on the show also describes a sense that Bigfoot is around, watching them. Any snap of a branch is potentially Bigfoot circling them. The thermal imager is employed to look into the thick brush when they hear a sound. The operator zooms in on any heat sources that appear on the camera. Some turn out to be rocks, still warm from the midday sun. Others move, making them more interesting. Smaller hotspots often turn out to be rodents, raccoons or beavers, while larger hotspots have been shown to be deer, elk and livestock. Unidentified hotspots, heat sources that dissipate and blurry images are all positioned as possibly Bigfoot.

Smelling Bigfoot

Bigfoot is said to have a very distinctive scent. Many accounts describe experiencing a foul, eye-watering odour in its presence, similar to a rotting carcass. Others maintain that Bigfoot smells like a raccoon. In one episode of *Finding Bigfoot*, Moneymaker and Barackman follow their nose to the source of the stench where they see a pair of eyes shining in the dark. Indeed, evidential strength increases if fieldworkers collect and corroborate multiple types of evidence such as both the waft of a foul aroma and eye shine in the nearby brush.[16]

While Bigfooters use their noses to track Bigfoot, Bigfoot is understood to use its own snout to find food. Bigfoots are attracted to the smell of food cooking on campsites, and one ploy to attract a nearby Sasquatch is to leave cooked meat around with a camera trap conveniently placed to photograph the animal feeding.

Feeling Bigfoot

Bigfoot is also felt. Scores of witnesses have reported incidents in which massive creatures have shaken their tent at night rocking it back and forth. While Bigfoot is not hostile, this is explained as Bigfoot sending a warning to campers that they have come too close and are disturbing prey. This is one of several actions that Bigfoot is said to perform in order to inform humans of their discontent. Another warning sign involves Bigfoots lobbing rocks at the feet of intruders. On night investigations, large splashes are recorded and sometimes referred to as Bigfoots throwing rocks to ward off potential threats like humans.

CONCLUSION

We have learnt a lot about Bigfooting. But what we have lost by being sat watching Sasquatching, rather than tramping the forest paths of the Pacific Northwest in the company of Bigfooters, is the potential to properly understand the ethnographic and sensory expertise of Bigfooters who are able to 'see' traces of Bigfoot. Through interviews and analysis of the Bigfooting literature and other documentary sources we are able to reconstruct the rationality of Bigfooting as regards evidence. Classic social histories of science can provide us with a model here. Shapin's (1975) study of phrenologists, for example, did not require ethnographic methods. Neither are ethnographic methods required to conduct a sociological investigation into the 'lay subjectivities' of the accidental witnesses to Bigfoot; for one thing we could not plan fieldwork that would allow us to experience these 'once in a lifetime events' with these witnesses. But the process of learning to see, to hear, to smell and even feel Bigfoot; that is a process of socialisation that all Bigfooters undergo, it is something we could only satisfactorily 'get inside' through ethnographic methods since it is an inherently embodied expertise that is best understood through experience.

STS *has* used ethnographic methods to understand experimental programmes to examine phenomena that mainstream science argues cannot exist (see Collins & Pinch, 1979). In these cases, the researcher might enter the field with a strong prior belief that the phenomena being studied simply do not exist, yet she will, at the same time, be committed to doing justice to the rationalities of the community being studied. What would symmetry mean within the context of an ethnography of Bigfooting, in which the primary 'experimental apparatus' is the body and its senses? For an ethnographer to learn to sensitise themselves to Bigfoot, we argue that she must adopt the position of the Bigfooting community – that Bigfoot exists, and that the practices of Bigfooting *can* collect evidence of this existence. This involves at least a methodological shift in a sceptic's ontology; the ethnographer of Bigfooting must be professionally committed to the practice of 'belief' even if/though it is in contradiction to her beliefs as a person. If the ethnographer is able to achieve this, she is equipped to learn to 'see' 'hear' and 'smell' as a Bigfooter, to distinguish the calls of Bigfoot from those of a mountain lion. Our lost ethnography of Bigfooting would therefore by being conducted, in part, in the isolated, disorientating, darkness of the forest at the dead of night, magnify the necessarily *embodied* nature of Bigfooting's knowledge practices, demanding an ethnographic eye, an ethnographic ear, as well as, importantly, an open-mind. This 'ability to see' is the very aspect of Bigfooting that is lost to us.

Our 'lost' Bigfooting ethnography is then also a loss to STS. It denies us an example of studying a practice which has the *formative intention* of producing knowledge-claims that appeals to scientific reasoning in a way that is far more conservative than parapsychology – which demands that new forces are added to our understanding of the universe – but which is nevertheless a case in which ethnographers will most likely enter the field 'knowing' that the object of the claim making does not exist. We suggest, therefore, that we have lost a useful 'hard case' against which ethnographers might test their methods for analysing the social

construction of knowledge claims. That is, in our lost ethnography of Bigfooting we cannot implicitly defer to 'truth' when thinking about the strengths or weaknesses, and the successes or failures, of the claim-making activities and evidential practices *within* Bigfooting communities.

Finally, ethnographic methods allow us to experience for ourselves new things; new places, practices, people and socialities. We bring traces of this back from the field. Some of these are 'objective' – documents, photographs, audio recordings, artefacts of the socialities in which we have spent time. But the most important traces of these socialities are subjective, the 'head notes' (Sanjeck, 1990) written into our expert subjectivities that we carry back with us; our contextual understanding of socialities that cannot be reduced to the objective, whether plaster casts or audio recordings.

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NOTES

1. Some maintain that *Bigfoot* and *Sasquatch* are distinct creatures. However, most members of the Bigfooting community understand them to be the same animal. In this chapter, we use the words interchangeably to mean the same phenomenon. In fact, several Bigfoot-like creatures are said to roam remote regions of the planet. The Himalayas is said to be home to the *Yeti*, the *Batut* is thought to reside in areas of Vietnam and Borneo, in Australia the *Yowie* is said to exist, China has the *Yeren*, Russia the *Almasty,* while in Indonesia the smaller *Orang Pendek* is supposed to inhabit the forests of Sumatra.
2. The BRFO and the Olympic Project stress that they are *scientific organizations* devoted to collecting evidence of Bigfoot.
3. Heuvelmans conducted research into the Yeti. Although the Yeti might itself be considered a mythical creature, it does not (necessarily) transgress scientific laws in the way a ghostly *apparition* or a *regenerative* fire bird would.
4. In 2012, *The Journal of Cryptozoology* begun publishing research articles and field reports on cryptids.
5. The Himalayan Yeti is also known as the 'Abominable' Snowman.
6. We can see how Bigfoot fits into particularly American myths of the relatively recent settlement (at least by Europeans) of 'the West', and the accompanying transformation and loss of the wild. Washington – prime Bigfoot country – only became a state in 1889. In 1850, when it was still Washington Territory, it had a population of just a few thousand, and by 1889 there was still only 350,000 inhabitants.
7. Unpacking terms such as 'wilderness' and 'tamed', which are contested and problematized categories, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Others such as Haraway (1984) and Taylor (2016) are better placed to discuss the histories and sociologies of these concepts.
8. The creature was reported to have thrown a tyre at the workmen. However, Coleman (2003) and Bader et al. (2010) maintain that there is good reason to doubt the credibility of the story, and that the event was simply a trick played by contractor Ray Wallace who became notorious for Bigfoot hoaxes.

9. Ilacqua (2014) maintains that the law serves a secondary – and arguably more important – purpose of protecting ramblers from being shot by Bigfooters mistaking them for Sasquatch.

10. However, some programmes on *Animal Planet* such as *Mermaids: The Body Found* are (relatively) openly mockumentaries – programmes that give the impression of being documentaries when in fact they are completely staged and their intention is to simply *entertain* the viewer with fictions. Nevertheless, this programme, with its 'authentic staging' fooled thousands of viewers and remains one of the network's most watched shows.

11. Furthermore, we claim that while Bigfooting is involved in attempting to make knowledge claims that would be acceptable to mainstream science, activities such as ghost hunting, astrology, and mediumship – in contrast to 'serious' parapsychology (Collins & Pinch, 1979) – make claims that are not directed towards the public, not science nor scientists. As such, we would argue that these kinds of activities are in an 'oblique orientation' with regard to science (Collins, Bartlett, & Reyes-Galindo, 2017).

12. The success of *Finding Bigfoot* has led to two spin-off shows: (i) Finding Bigfoot: Further Evidence and (ii) Finding Bigfoot: Rejected Evidence. Note the emphasis on 'evidence' and the apparent willingness to 'debunk'.

13. 'Bobo', standing over six feet, stands as proxy for Bigfoot in these re-enactments. If he is unable to get close to crossing the road in three giant leaps, it is determined that it would be impossible for a human to achieve this.

14. For Matt Crowley, the 'dermal ridges' are simply artefacts of this casting process (Loxton & Prothero, 2013).

15. "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth", as Sherlock Holmes says in The Sign of the Four (Doyle, 1890). Of course, Holmes had his own adventures investigating, and debunking, an apparently mythical creature terrorising the Devonshire moors.

16. Eye shine may form part of an account told by a Bigfoot witness. Witnesses on the show have reported seeing a pair of yellow eyes staring at them eight feet off the ground. On occasions this is explained away as an owl perched on a tree branch.

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